Food

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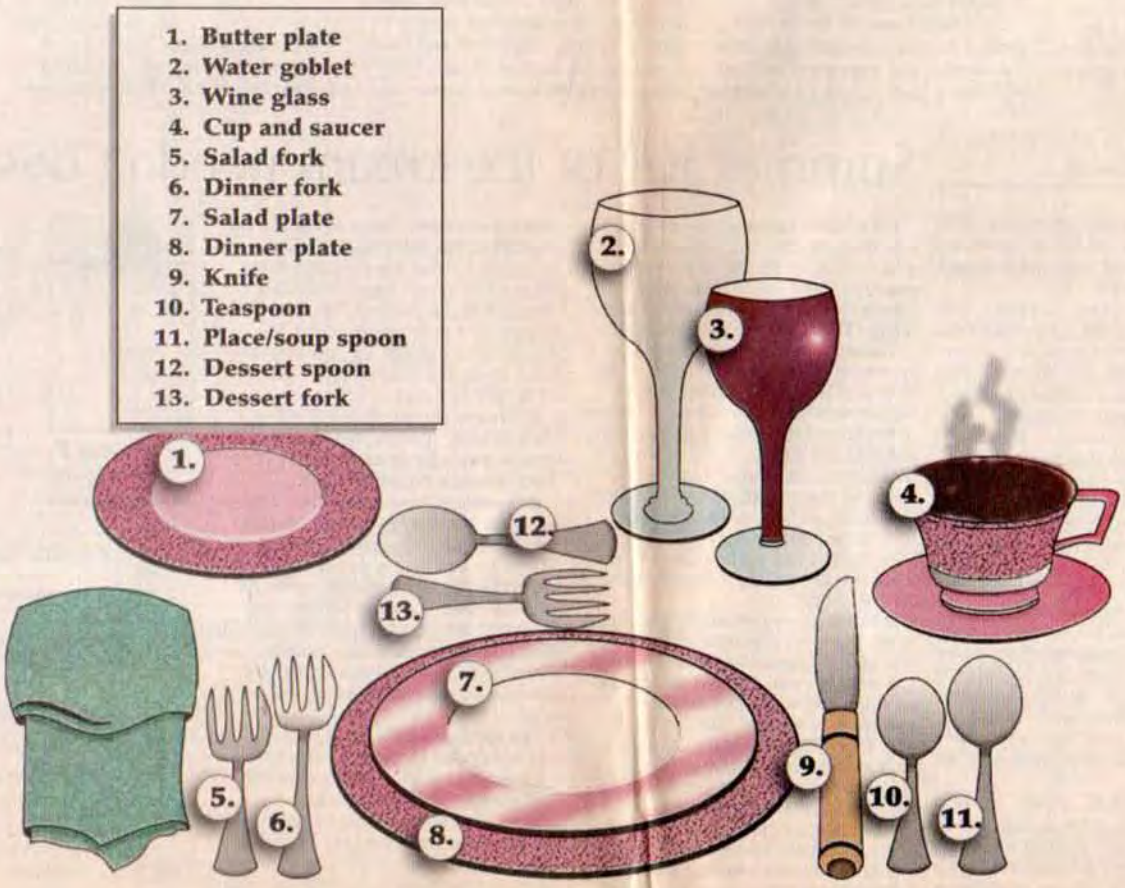

Kim Bain

Pardon me, but is that my roll?

Tips for surviving business, special occasion dinners

By TERI JOHNSON
Staff Writer

Your company is forking over big bucks for a fancy meal, and you don't want to embarrass yourself in front of a client.

So what do you do with the extra spoon?

The basic rule of thumb with silverware is to start from the outside and work in, says Teri Leiter, co-owner of Leiters' Fine Catering Inc. in Williamsport.

Syndi Seid, president and founder of Advanced Etiquette in San Francisco, says people have the most problems with which fork to use, what's expected of them as a host or guest and how to hold a napkin.

Guests should wait until their host or hostess has lifted his or her fork or spoon to start eating before doing the same.

Wait until everyone at the table has been served before starting to eat.

Put the napkin on your lap during the meal. When you're finished, loosely fold the napkin and place it to the left of your place setting, Seid says.

If you have to leave the table in the middle of the meal, put the napkin on the chair.

Confusion often arises when many place settings are squeezed around a table, Leiter says.

When that happens, people sometimes wonder which bread plate is theirs.

Remember that the coffee cup is placed to the right of each setting, above the spoons. The handle of the coffee cup should be at 3 o'clock, Leiter says.

Your bread plate is to the left, above the forks.

Food items always go to the left, and beverages are on the right, Seid says.

She says everything in life is a learned course.

If you use proper manners at home, you won't have trouble in a fancy restaurant, she says.

"If you build the skills, you can feel comfortable anywhere you are," Seid says.

What to do if ...

Syndi Seid, founder and president of Advanced Etiquette in San Francisco, offers some suggestions on situations you might encounter at a fancy dinner:

■ What do you do if you drop your fork?

Ask the waiter to bring another one. Leave the dropped utensil on the floor.

■ What if you accidentally take a fellow diner's roll?

Instead of offering your roll to the person, ask the server to bring another one.

■ Which way should you pass the bread?

Pass items counterclockwise.

This custom arose because the guest of honor is seated to the right of the host.

■ How should you get a conversation going?

It's the duty of every diner to make conversation with those seated to their right and left. Make conversation with the person across from you only as convenient.

■ What if you're a fast eater?

Monitor the pace at which others at the table are eating, and try to keep up.

Plates shouldn't be removed until everyone at the table has finished.

■ What do you do when you're done with a course?

Picture a clock and place the knife and fork at the 10:20 position, with the tips of the utensils at 10 and the handles at 4.

How to set your table

Here are some tips from Oneida Ltd., a tableware manufacturer based in Oneida, N.Y., on setting the table:

■ The words fork and left both have four letters; the fork goes to the left. Likewise, the words knife, spoon and right each have five letters; the knife and spoon go to the right.

■ Allow 24 inches for each place setting.

■ Knives should be placed with the cutting edge toward the plate.

■ Arrange flatware in order of use, working from the outside toward the plate for each course.

■ The seafood/cocktail fork is placed to the right of the place spoon, unless placed on the cocktail plate.

■ Tall drink spoons are placed to the right of the dinner plate, and the beverage should be served on a small plate so there is a place for the tall drink spoon after use.